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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a survey that examined elementary school teachers' attitudes about social studies (particularly geography) instruction. The responses of newly-hired elementary teachers were compared to those of experienced elementary teachers. The survey included questions such as: Have you ever taken a social studies methods course? Have you taken a geography course? At what age should children start learning geography? List the areas of the social studies/geography curriculum in which you feel staff development would be most worthwhile. Among the conclusions of the study were that newly-hired teachers had a better background in geography than experienced teachers; teachers did not seem to enjoy teaching social studies as much as other curriculum areas; and staff development needed to be centered around creative activities for teaching geographic concepts. (DB)

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Geography Needs Assessment: A Focus On Teacher Training and Awareness

A Paper Presentation for the National Council for Geographic Education Annual Conference

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INTRODUCTION

Great changes are occuring in education. There is a growing emphasis on testing students. Testing will affect how students are taught and the way curriculum is written. Changes in testing and curriculum leave out an essential factor: teacher effectiveness. Teachers need quality staff ddevelopment in order to help students meet instructional goals.

The National Assessment of Educational Processes proposes a national assessment in student learning in grades 4, 8, and 12 beginning in 1994. The specific study areas are geography, writing, mathematics, science, reading, and United States history. It is significant that two of the six areas are in the social stiudies. The desired goal is "world class" performance by the year 2000 as found in "America 2000."

A consensus process has found that teaching emphasis on geography is minimal. Public leaders are aware of the need for geographically literate citizens. There is increased public concern for the nation's geographic ignorance. There is a mandate for assessment which includes: testing skills, a viable testing format, and a method of organizing instruction. Nowhere is the education of teachers made a priority.

The survey was designed to determine teacher perceptions about social studies, particularily geography, instruction. Are newly hired teachers aware of changes in geography instruction? Do they have better training than experienced

teachers? Do their attitudes demonstrate an emphasis on teaching geography?

In order to implement curriculum/testing changes, teachers need training to teach geographic skills. Peters (1990) stresses that staff development needs to focus on subject matter. Ford (1988) asserts that teachers need to be assessed on their preparation and acquisition of skills and concepts.

There is little research done in the area of elementary social studies. Most studies concentrate on secondary social studies. Much of the data in my study can be compared to the findings of Drummond (1989.) Drummond found that lack of teacher training in Indiana may be encouraging weaknesses in geography education. There were no rigid specifications for certification. Teachers in Indiana face a curriculum with emphasis on geography but have no skills or understandings needed to maintain a comfort level in the classroom.

Different authors speak to different components of effective staff development. Effective staff development should have the same components of an effective classroom lesson. The chart shows some of the steps each author used in his/her model for staff development. None of them are as detailed as the classroom model. All three models include: motivation, guided practice, and independent practice. These are three components of an effective classroom lesson. Binko refers to "feedback" as the effectiveness of the presentation. Winn's feedback refers to the effective use of strategies in the classroom.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT MODELS

Winn (1990)	Binko (1989)	Ford (1988)
theory presentation	awareness	preparation
demonstration	understanding	acquisition
guided practice	guided practice	participation
classroom practice	implementation	
feedback		
coaching		

Another study by Biddle (1990) concentrates efforts on collecting data, analyzing data, preparing units of study, and evaluating student progress. Collecting data, such as teacher surveys, is an important step in designing effective staff development.

Winn (1990) noted that there is a critical link between research and classroom performance. The critical link is staff development. The State Education Department has begun to distribute findings at the teacher level. These findings have been used as background for development of MSPAP tests.

Winn came to several conclusions about staff development and effective teaching:

1. Change is gradual and difficult for some teachers. We face more rapid change in the area of testing and teaching strategies needed for testing.
2. Teachers have varying competencies. The survey is designed to measure training and awareness levels of teachers. Identifying

teacher readiness is essential in formulating effectice staff development.

3. There should be a relationship between staff sdevelopment and school goals. The survey reflects teachers' needs as well as attitudes.

4. Teachers need to be involved in prioritizing, implementing, and providing staff development. The survey identifies awareness and preparation levels of teachers.

5. Staff development uses the best of what is known about effectivre teaching. The survey assesses training and awareness as well as what teachers themselves need to be effective.

METHOD

Thirty randomly selected newly hired elementary teachers were surveyed. There were 211 newly hired teachers in all. The results of the survey for newly hired teachers may be generalized to the entire population. The experienced teachers were the faculty of a local elementary school. There were no new teachers in this school's population.

The format was designed to be easily read by the respondents and easily tallied by the surveyor.

RESULTS

Question 1: Have you taken a social studies methods course?

Newly Hired		Experienced	
Y	42%	Y	39%
N	58%	N	61%

Question 2: Was this course a requirement for certification?

Newly Hired		Experienced	
Y	40%	Y	37%
N	60%	N	72%

Question 3: Was this course a requirement for graduation?

Y	40%	Y	37%
N	60%	N	62%

1. Currently, it seems that courses required for graduation would be required for certification since degree programs must be approved by the state board of education.

2. Since history/social studies are taught at all grade levels, it is surprising that more teachers have not had methods courses. According to Thornton (1989) 44% of teachers nationwide have had social studies methods courses. This percentage includes all teachers.

3. The percentage responses from newly hired and experienced teachers did not vary much.

Question 4: Have you taken a geography course?

Newly Hired		Experienced	
Y	86%	Y	37%
N	12%	N	62%

Question 5: Was this course a requirement for certification?

Newly Hired		Experienced	
Y	51%	Y	37%
N	48%	N	62%

Question 6: Was this course a requirement for graduation?

Newly Hired		Experienced	
Y	65%	Y	37%
N	35%	N	62%

1. Surprisingly 86% of newly hired (only 37% of experienced) teachers have had a geography course.
2. Fifty-one percent of newly hired (37% experienced) teachers were required to take a geography course for certification.
3. Sixty-five percent of newly hired (only 37% of experienced) teachers were required to take a geography course for graduation.
4. Based on limited results, it may be that colleges are now requiring students to have better preparation in geography.
5. Course work is indicative of "training" at least on the "awareness" level. Awareness is an important component of effective staff development.

Question 7: How many geography courses did you take?

Newly Hired		Experienced	
0	12%	0	37%
1	86%	1	62%
2	.5%	2	0%
3	0%	3	0%

Question 8: List geography course work:

Newly Hired		Experienced	
Cultural	10%	Human	20%
Human	20%	World	60%
101	14%	Earth Science	20%
World	20%		
Physical	10%		
100	5%		
Introductory	25%		

1. Drummond (1989) reports that teachers face a curriculum heavy with emphasis on geography but have no foundation skills or understandings needed to maintain a comfort level in the classroom. This may be so for experienced teachers, to a degree. Newly hired teachers, however, are much better prepared to teach geography. Eighty-six percent of them have had at least one course in geography.

2. Introductory courses in geography accounted for 100% of the course work for both newly hired and experienced teachers.

3. College courses have different numbers and titles. It is impossible to determine course content.

4. Seventy percent of teachers have had course work in physical geography..

5. Thirty percent of teachers have had course work in cultural geography. It is interesting that cultural geography is the basis for most school curriculums.

Question 9: At what age should children first start learning geography?

Age:	4	5	6	7	8	9
Newly Hired:	12%	63%	22%	3%		
Experienced:		30%	43%	21%	6%	

Question 9: Why? Comments;

Newly Hired	Experienced
awareness level=3	terminology=1
age appropriateness=1	age appropriateness= 1
global perspective=1	vocabulary=1
integrate=1	spatial awareness=1
retain=1	parental input=1
basics=5	exposure=1
curious/interest=4	environment=1
environment=2	basics=1
fun=1	

1. Ninety-seven percent of newly hired (73% of experienced) teachers feel geography instruction should begin by age six.

2. Only 3 percent of newly hired (21% of experienced)

teachers feel geography instruction should begin at age seven which is equivalent to grade 2.

3. There was much variety of reasons for geography instruction by both groups of teachers. The newly hired teachers gave a wider variety of responses. The newly hired group mentioned such phrases as "fun", "integrate", "global perspective", and "curious/interest level." These are phrases which are popular with geographers today.

4. Both groups mentioned "basics."

5. Newly hired teachers seem more aware of current trends in geography education. They used "catch words" more often.

Question 10: What subjects do you enjoy teaching most?

Newly Hired		Experienced	
Art	6	Art	6
Language Arts	1	Language Arts	5
Music	7	Music	7
Math	3	Math	2
Reading	2	Reading	3
Science	4	Science	1
Social Studies	5	Social Studies	4

1. According to Thornton (1989) it is the teacher who actually determines the curriculum taught. Teachers perhaps do a better job of teaching what they like and feel comfortable with.

2. It would be interesting to note the preparation level of the teachers. Many teachers have had more extensive preparatory work to teach some courses than others and so feel more com-

fortable teaching those courses.

3. With staff development social studies will be ranked higher because it is a high interest subject for students and teachers alike.

4. Social studies ranked in the middle for both newly hired and experienced teachers.

5. Surprisingly, for this group of experienced teachers, science was the subject they enjoyed teaching most. Perhaps more research would determine why this was so.

Question 11: Rank the components of social studies in the order you enjoy teaching most.

Newly Hired		Experienced	
Government	5	Government	3
Economics	4	Economics	5
Geography	1	Geography	1
History	2	History	2
Sociology	3	Sociology	4

1. History and geography make a good team.

2. It can be argued that geography, especually cultural geography, includes many social sciences.

3. Thornton (1989) says teachers need assistance on what to teach how to teach, and its effect on education.

4. Interestingly, geography is the component of social studies both newly hired and experienced teachers like to teach the most.

Question 12: What subjects are most important in terms of student learning?

Newly Hired		Experienced	
Art	7	Art	6
Language Arts	2	Language Arts	3
Math	3	Math	2
Reading	1	Reading	1
Science	4	Science	5
Social Studies	5	Social Studies	4
Music	6	Music	7

1. Social Studies ranked in the mower middle for both newly hired and experienced teachers.
2. The "3 r's" were still the top rated subjects for both newly hired and experienced teachers.
3. Teachers are concerned about a shortage of time. They feel they must teach what they perceive as most important.
4. It is important to diffuse social studies concepts across the curriculum. Increased awareness of opportunities to diffuse social studies is essential to increasing the perceived status of social studies.

Question 13: List areas for staff development in geography. Comments from both newly hired and experienced teachers are grouped together.

Ideas for geography staff development:

1. integrate social studies/geography with reading/language arts
2. ideas for implementation
3. hands on ideas not a text
4. appropriate literature
5. creating materials
6. new strategies
7. share what works
8. motivate teachers
9. teach to assess homogeneously grouped students

1. None of the teachers mentioned training for MSPAP tests in geography or social studies. Because of new testing, it was thought to be a priority need.
2. Teachers are aware of the need to integrate social studies/ geography with other curriculum areas.
3. Teachers want strategies that work.

DISCUSSION

1. It would appear that most teachers, whether newly hired or experienced, have not taken a social studies methods course.

2. Eighty-six percent of newly hired, but only thirty-seven percent of experienced teachers have taken a geography course. These teachers are probably at a greater "awareness" level for teaching geography to elementary students.

3. Most teachers, especially newly hired teachers, have had only one geography course. These were basically introductory courses. Seventy percent of these courses were in physical geography. Most elementary curriculum centers around cultural geography.

4. Both groups of teachers thought geography instruction should begin by the second grade. Sixty-three percent of newly hired teachers say instruction should begin in first grade. Forth-three percent of experienced teachers say instruction should begin in second grade.

5. Again, newly hired teachers seem to have more awareness. Their responses as to why instruction should begin earlier include "buzz words" like: age appropriate, interest level, fun, and global perspective.

6. Social studies was ranked near the lower middle in terms of teacher enjoyment for teaching a subject. Perhaps if teachers had a greater background, they would enjoy teaching social studies more.

7. Both groups of teachers thought geography the most important component of the social studies.

8. The "3R's" were still at the top of both teachers' lists in terms of importance for student learning. The social studies ranked in the lower middle. More work needs to be done in terms of teaching teachers to integrate social studies skills across the curriculum.

9. Surprisingly, teachers did not want inservice on teaching skills for student success on the social studies portion of the MSPAP tests. Most of the wishes for staff development were for increased information about creative activities which really get the concepts across to students.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Teachers had fewer preparatory courses in teaching social studies than expected.

2. Newly hired teachers had a better background in geography than experienced teachers.

3. Most teachers agree with current research that geography instruction needs to begin in the primary classroom.

4. Teachers do not seem to enjoy teaching social studies as much as other curriculum areas. They have not had as much training for the social studies as in other areas.

5. Staff development needs to be centered around creative activities for teaching geographic concepts.

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GEOGRAPHY/SOCIAL STUDIES QUESTIONNAIRE

	Circle the letter	
Have you taken a social studies methods course?	Y	N
Was this course required for certification?	Y	N
Was this course required for graduation?	Y	N
Have you taken a geography course?	Y	N
Was this course required for certification?	Y	N
Was this course required for graduation?	Y	N

How many college geography courses did you take? _____#

List titles (abbreviate) of geography course work:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

At what age should children start learning geography? _____age

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. Rank in order those subjects you enjoy teaching most.(1=most, 7=least)

___ art ___ language arts
___ math ___ music
___ reading ___ science
___ social studies

. Rank in order the components of social studies you enjoy teaching most. (1=most, 6=least)

___ economics ___ geography
___ history ___ government
___ sociology ___ other:

. Rank in order subjects which you feel are most portant in terms of student learning: (1=most, 7=least)

___ art ___ language arts
___ math ___ music
___ reading ___ science
___ social studies

. List the areas of the social studies/geography curric- ım in which you feel staff development would be ost worthwhile:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

IANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE. Please return to: Bill Fitzhugh, Resiterstown Elem., soon as possible.

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